



Interviewing Juvenile Sex Trafficking Victims





What is a forensic interview?

The goal of a forensic interview is to obtain a statement from a child/adolescent, in a developmentally sensitive, unbiased and legally defensible manner that will support accurate and fair decision making in the criminal justice and child welfare systems.



How is it different from a standard interview?

The two overriding features of a forensic interview :

- Forensic interviews are **hypothesis testing** rather than **hypothesis confirming**.
- Forensic interviews should be victim centered.

Interview considerations

- If you anticipate that a child/adolescent victim/witness has information that could be used in criminal proceedings against another person, that victim/witness should be forensically interviewed.
- If you anticipate conducting a forensic interview, familiarize yourself with the protocol. It is **highly recommended** that you are trained and comfortable with this process before conducting interviews.



Interview Considerations

- Forensic interviews are supported by research and best practice
- Social, emotional, cognitive, sexual and language development
- Agency protocol/guidelines
- The interview can determine the threshold for admission of evidence and statements in court. If done incorrectly, the interview could become the focus of the court case.



Interview Considerations

- The victim* is the most important part of the investigation – but not the only part!

*For brevity, *victim* will be used to describe the child/adolescent being interviewed. Remember, it is possible that the person you are interviewing has not been victimized.

Preparing for the Interview

- Know the case and the names of individuals involved.
- Know as much as possible about the victim:
 - Last grade completed?
 - Mental health history? Developmental delays?
 - Is the victim prescribed medications? Is she taking them?
 - Who does the victim live with?
 - Where is the child going after the interview? (i.e. placement, detention, etc.)
 - Has the victim been previously interviewed by law enforcement/child protection?
- Know the elements of the potential crimes involved (both state and federal)
- Talk to the UC or other officers who had contact with the victim. What was the victim's demeanor?
- Was any information available from the victim's personal belongings? (i.e. cell phone, items in purse)

Juvenile Sex Trafficking Victims

- ▶ The victim of juvenile sex trafficking is defined as any child who has not attained the age of 18 years who is recruited, enticed, harbored, transported, provided, obtained, or maintained for the purposes of engaging in a commercial sex act.
- ▶ The offender is defined as an individual who causes the victim to be recruited, enticed, harbored, transported, provided or maintained for the purpose of commercial sex.

Understanding your Victim

Understanding the victim is important to a successful interview.

- Is she street smart?
- Does she express emotion or appear “hardened”?
- Does she seem fearful?
- Does she have a history of being manipulative?
- Is she angry?

Loyalty

The victim may be loyal to her pimp for the following reasons:

- Fear
- Prior life experiences
- Belief that they aren't worthy of a better life

Trauma Bond

- ▶ Trauma bonding occurs as the result of ongoing cycles of abuse in which intermittent reinforcement of reward and punishment creates powerful emotional bonds that are resistant to change.

*BAU Guide

Victim Identification

- Try to establish the identity of the victim before you start the interview.
- If appropriate, contact the family for identification. But first, be sure to verify authenticity of person you are contacting!
- Establish the victim's history through the family contact.

Timing Concerns



Benefits of interviewing the victim immediately, if possible:

- Preservation of evidence
- Increased likelihood of locating suspect
- Proper and timely identification of victim and/or guardian
- Prevents influence from other incarcerated victims

Unconventional Interview

- Remember, this is an interview, **NOT** an interrogation.
- Overcoming the bond between the pimp and the victim takes time.
- You must work to establish trust with the victim. Don't make promises that you can't keep!
- Multiple meetings will be necessary.

Where to Begin?

- Location, location, location.
 - Location of the interview can be determined by the type of operation. Decide ahead of time where the interviews will be done.
- Who will be part of the interview team?
- Who should be permitted to view the interview?
- Will you be videotaping the interview?

Location



Interviewing Protocols/Guidelines

Interviewing guidelines have been developed for FBI Agents and TFO's who are interviewing child/adolescent victims and witnesses of crime.

The Phased Interview

A phased interview structure minimizes suggestive influences and empowers the victim to be informative. These goals are accomplished in three ways:

1. Victims receive clear information about the interviewer's job and the ground rules for the interview.
2. The interviewer builds rapport in a way that encourages the victim to talk.
3. The interviewer elicits information in the least directive question format.

Hypothesis Testing

Interviewers generate a set of alternative hypotheses about the sources meaning of the allegation. This is done by:

- Ruling out alternative explanations for the allegations.
- Ensuring, to the extent possible, that the alleged actions are not subject to multiple interpretations and that any alleged perpetrators are clearly identified.

Victim Centered

Interviewers should understand social, emotional, cognitive and sexual development of the victim they are interviewing.

Phases of the Interview

1. Rapport Building
2. Establishing the Ground Rules/Suggestibility Testing
3. Conduct a Practice Interview
4. Introducing the topic
5. Free Narrative
6. Questioning and Clarification (Hypothesis Testing)
7. Closure

Phase 1: Rapport Building

Rapport building begins with the initial introduction and continues throughout the interview. Building rapport helps to:

1. Make the victim comfortable with the interview setting.
2. Get preliminary information about victim's verbal skills and cognitive maturity.
3. Convey that the goal of the interview is for the victim to talk.

Rapport Building

- Begin rapport building during first contact. (This may be during transportation to interview location.)
- Limit number of officers who have contact with the victim.
 - Everyone won't be as sympathetic as the interviewer/investigator and could damage rapport.
- Use a personal tone during interview.

Rapport Building

Reassure the victim:

- I am not going to lie to you.
- I am not going to charge you for things you tell me about (dependent on jurisdictions).
- Stay away from the “P” word.

Rapport Building

Be prepared for the victim's questions. Honest answers are important!

- Where am I going when you are done talking with me?
- Who knows you are talking to me?
- Will I have to testify?



Rapport Building

- Display knowledge /understanding of the prostitution subculture.
 - Terminology
 - Common Practices
- Discuss topics not related to the investigation.
 - School
 - Future plans -- demonstrate your interest in the victim and not just the case.
- Discuss options for life after “the game”.



Phase 2: Establishing Ground Rules/Suggestibility Testing

- “Tell the truth” Instruction
- “I Don’t Know” Instruction
- “I Don’t Want to Answer” Instruction
-
- “I Don’t Understand” Instruction
- “Correct Me” Instruction

Phase 3: Conduct a Practice Interview

- Prior to the interview, or during rapport building phase, the interviewer should identify a non-abuse event that the victim has recently experienced.
- Have victim narrate event from beginning to end.
- Assess developmental concepts as necessary.

Phase 4: Introducing the Topic

The substantive portion of the interview begins when the interviewer prompts a **transition to the target topic**. Interviewers should start with the least suggestive prompt that might raise the topic, avoiding mention of particular individuals or events.

Introducing the Topic

- “Tell me how come you came here today?”
- “Tell me the reason you are here today?”
- “It’s my understanding that you were in a hotel room when the police showed up...tell me about that.”

Introducing the Topic

If the victim provides no response, become more focused:

- “I heard you told _____ something. Tell me what you talked about.”
- “I heard that something might have happened to you at_____.”
- “Once the victim answers, follow up with open-ended question: Tell me all about _____.”

What to Expect

- Hostility and deception
- Affection for and loyalty to their pimp
- Shame and/or embarrassment
- Attempts by victim to control the interview:
 - Changing the subject
 - Identifying the wrong pimp
 - Blaming police/arguing charge
- Manipulation

How to Deal with Manipulation

- Many victims use manipulation to survive.
- Set boundaries
- Address manipulation-- let the victim know they don't have to manipulate you.

Common Deceptions



- I don't have sex, I only give massages.
- This was my first night working...my first date.
- I learned the game from my friends (TV, people in the neighborhood etc.)
- I don't have a pimp.
- My father's name is in my phone as "Daddy".
- He is not my pimp, he is my boyfriend.

Common Deceptions



- I just like to have sex.
- I spent all my money on clothes and “stuff”.
- Why would I give my money to a man?
- I did have a pimp but not anymore.
- I really only work when I want.
- I have learned my lesson. I’m not going to do this anymore.
- I just met that girl tonight. (Referring to the adult prostitute they were with when picked up).

Phase 5: Free Narrative

After the topic is raised, the interviewer asks the victim to provide a narrative description of the events. The free narrative encourages the victim to describe the events in their own words.

- Start at the beginning and go all the way to the end and tell me everything that happened, even things you don't think are important.
- Tell me all about _____ from the beginning to the very end.

****The most common interviewer error is omitting the narrative phase or shifting to soon to a specific question.**

Free Narrative

- Let the victim talk – try not to interrupt the narrative. Rather than interrupting, keep track of the follow up questions you want to ask.
- Use facilitative cues to encourage more narration.
- **Listen** for the areas of the narrative that you want to focus on during clarification phase.
- **Listen** for statements that can be corroborated.
- **Listen** for the elements of the crime(s).

Phase 6: Questioning and Clarification

The questioning and clarification phase begins after it is clear that the victim has finished providing a free narrative. **This phase is a time to ask follow up questions, seek legally-relevant information, and to clarify statements.**

Questioning and Clarification

After the narrative phase, it is time to focus on legally relevant information:

- Establish the jurisdiction
- Establish the timeline
- Establish the sequence of events during the abuse
- Establish the number of times the abuse occurred. If it was long-term abuse, ask the victim to describe first time, last time, and the time she remembers most.
- Identify other crimes and/or victims (ie. Production of child pornography, sexual contact between victim and pimp...)
- Separate out each event
- Ask about sensory detail

Questions

- ▶ Use the question continuum
- ▶ Stay away from blaming statements

Open-Ended Questions

Initially, ask general, open-ended questions. Open-ended questions allow victims to select specific details they will discuss. Open-ended questions encourage multiple-word responses. Consider using the “Tell me...” method.

- “You said he took you into a room. Tell me all of the things that were in the room.”
- “You said, ‘That other time.’ Tell me about that other time.”

This method usually results in a short narrative without many details but allows you to ask follow up questions.

Open-Ended Questions

Using open-ended questions, attempt to learn the following information*:

- How, when, and where the victim got into “the game.”
- Has the victim ever tried to leave “the game”?
- How the victim perceives her pimp.

*If it was not clear in the free narrative phase.

Open-Ended Questions

During this phase, you may experience:

- The victim often only admits to what they think you know or should know.
- The interviewer should disclose very little known information unless necessary to obtain further details.
- The victim may test the interviewer's knowledge of the events.
- The victim may try to frustrate the interviewer to get them to stop the interview.

Specific/Focused Questions

Begin to narrow down details through more specific questions. Specific or focused questions* ask for details about topics that the victim already mentioned.

- “What were you doing when he came over?”
- “What did your mom say after you told her?”

*Note: These are **NOT** leading questions.

Specific/Focused Questions

Keep the victim on track.

- If it goes against known rules of “the game” it is most likely a false statement.
- Interviewer must determine when to challenge answers.
 - Avoid disrespecting or belittling the victim.
 - Avoid use of the word why
 - Avoid blaming statements
 - Challenge with confidence to avoid being manipulated.



Remember



Victims may be more willing to talk about a previous pimp than their current one. Start there! The victim often only admits to what they think you know or should know.

- Opportunity to build further rapport and trust.
- You may collect enough information for a separate prosecution.
- You may be collecting the information that another LE agency has been waiting for!

Don't Forget to Cover

- Recruitment
- Relationship with pimp
- Pimp's knowledge of victim's age
- Who taught victim the rules? (i.e. dates, money etc)
- Interstate nexus
- Methods of control (i.e. violence, threats)
- Knowledge of other minors, girls who are working for the pimp
- Pictures (child pornography)
- Any information that can corroborate victim statements, no matter how insignificant it may seem

Ask yourself...

Do I have a clear picture
of what happened to
this victim?



If not, it likely won't be clear to
others watching the interview.
Go back and ask clarifying
questions.

Phase 7: Closure

- Give the victim an opportunity to express worries or concerns about the interview/investigative process.
- De-escalate the victim if needed.
- Allow the victim to ask questions.
 - “ I have asked you a lot of questions , do you have any questions for me?”
- Keep the interview process open by allowing the victim to re-contact you if she remembers or learns any additional information.
- Don't make promises!
- Focus on neutral topics as you close the interview (i.e. future plans or something the victim is excited about)

Safety Plan

- ▶ After the interview determine if mental health assessment needs to be completed on victim.
- ▶ Discuss what will happen when victim leaves interview.

Victim Disclosure

- Is a process, not a one-time event.
- Disclosure may not come during the first interviews; it usually requires multiple meetings with the victim.
- Not all meetings with the victim should be focused on getting a disclosure. Check in with them and show an interest in their life.
- Eventually, the victim begins to blame the pimp and not themselves.

The Re-Interview

- Revisit the victim's statements
 - Narrow down **necessary** facts. Do not cover every single detail again – only the ones necessary for clarification.
 - Address inconsistencies in a victim-friendly way
- Clarify or confirm new information you have discovered during your investigation.

Summary

- The interviewer needs to build a relationship with the victim.
- The first couple “interviews” might only be rapport building until you build trust with the victim.
- Determine your availability to your victims.
- Some victims will never disclose – no matter what!
- Follow up with questions regarding previous pimps. Any information about pimps is useful.

Breaking the Bond

Breaking the bond takes:

- Time
- Patience
- Consistency
- Honesty
- Services

Questions??

